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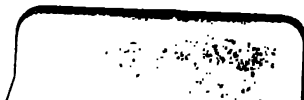
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A
LETTER
TO THE
RIGHT HON. THE LORD NORTH,
CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,
CONCERNING
SUBSCRIPTION TO THE XXXIX ARTICLES,
AND PARTICULARLY
THE UNDERGRADUATE SUBSCRIPTION
IN
THE UNIVERSITY.
BY A MEMBER OF CONVOCATION,
*(Generally supposed to be GEORGE HORNE, D.D. the learned President of
Magdalen College.)*
WITH A PREFACE AND NOTES BY THE EDITOR.

OXFORD,
PRINTED BY W. BAXTER ;
SOLD BY J. PARKER ; AND MESSRS. RIVINGTON, AND ROAKE AND VARTEY,
LONDON.
1834.

. 643 .



PREFACE.

THIS Letter to Lord North must not be confounded with another, addressed to the same noble Lord in 1772, upon the general subject of Clerical Subscription, the principles of which, like those of all the other Letters and Discourses on the anti-subscription side of the question, are Arian or Socinian. The present Letter has been assigned to the good temper, cultivated talents, and polished style, of George Horne, D.D. the late pious and learned President of Magdalen College, and Bishop of Norwich. Though it be not printed with his Works, and though there can be found no acknowledgments that it came from his pen, Middleton, in his Decads, p. 320, attributes it to Dr. Horne, and the internal evidence confirms that attribution. The allusions to Priestley are in perfect keeping with Dr. Horne's known Letters to that very able and scientific unbeliever. The topics, style, and temper of the Letter are all in unison with those of his known and acknowledged pamphlets; and so strong and clear have these evidences appeared to the Editor, that

he has had no hesitation in following Middleton, and in ascribing it to the late President of Magdalen College.

Perhaps enough may have been already said, to satisfy duties merely editorial ; but the controversies which have been revived of late upon the subject of Subscription to the Articles seem, if not to impose the duty, at least to suggest the usefulness, of entering upon a review of those which occupied the attention of the Church and nation about sixty years ago. The review must be cursory and general ; but it may serve to connect the present with the former questions upon the same subjects ; for the polemics of the present day are but travelling over again the beaten paths of by-gone discussions, and perhaps with knowledge and abilities inferior to those which were possessed by their predecessors in the argument.

If these *Subscription-controversies* were surveyed in their earliest history, they would be found to be coeval with the times which witnessed the accusations of Cartwright and Travers, and the answers of Whitgift and Hooker. Such a retrospect would also embrace the whole of those necessary protective and defensive measures, which, originating in the prudence and fortitude of Archbishops Parker and Whitgift, were pursued with the same firm and discreet resolution during the Primacy of Archbishop Bancroft, and

ultimately led to that most salutary ordinance, which required the test of a subscription to the three Articles of the thirty-sixth Canon, as an evidence of conformity to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the Church of England, and as a qualification for orders and offices in that Church, and for Degrees at the Universities.

But for the purpose of setting forth the affinities of the present pamphlet, it will not be necessary to enter upon so remote a period ; neither will it be necessary to dwell upon those later questions concerning the *right sense of Subscription*, in 1712 and afterwards, which, though they differed from the former in principle and purpose, caused new distractions in the Church, but by calling forth the energies of a Waterland, essentially served the cause of truth, and led to the demonstration, that it was not lawful *to subscribe the Articles in an Arian sense*. Though the struggles of the Arian, upon this occasion, differed from those of the Puritan, in every way that men's motives and conduct can be compared, they both agreed in the determination to resist, and if possible to get rid of, Subscription to articulate statements of religious opinion. It is, however, to be observed, that these latter controversies turned altogether upon Trinitarian, not Disciplinary or Calvinistic, points ; and farther, that the objections of Whithy, Whiston, and Clarke were the forerun-

ners and preparers of the way for those more formidable assaults, which were afterwards made by Blackburne, Jebb, Lindsey, Disney, Evanson, and the *Fratres Poloni* of the Feathers' Tavern.

If, for the illustration of this tract, its connection be sought with the discussions of the times in which it was written, and with the causes and occasions of those discussions, it will be necessary to refer to that inauspicious volume, which is said to have produced eighty controversial pamphlets, between 1766 and 1772, *the Confessional* of Francis Blackburne, M.A. Archdeacon of Cleveland. With the same view it will be necessary to revert to the association of the two hundred and fifty Clergymen and Laymen at the Feathers' Tavern in the Strand, which may be said to have grown out of the doctrines of *the Confessional*, and which petitioned Parliament on the 6th of February, 1772, for relief from all subscriptions to all articles of religious doctrine and discipline. Reference must be also made to the motion of Sir William Meredith, on presenting that petition to Parliament, and to the other motion made by the same Baronet in February of the following year, to relieve the Undergraduate Academics of Oxford from their Subscriptions, upon the special grounds of their extreme youth, their ignorance of the Articles, their incompetency to understand them, and their alleged want of instruction upon those subjects.

It may be here observed, that during the two disputatious years, 1772, 1773, controversies were going on upon the subject of Subscriptions both among the Clergy and among dissenting ministers; (for, according to the Toleration Act as it then stood, dissenting teachers were obliged to subscribe all the Articles but the 34th, 35th, 36th, and the first clause of the 20th.) There were controversies also concerning lay as well as clerical Subscription; controversies upon Academic Subscriptions, as they were required at Oxford, and as they were required at Cambridge; in short, it seemed as if, by common consent, a truce had taken place between dissidents upon all other matters, that their energies might be concentrated, and exclusively directed to the question about Subscriptions: and sermon upon sermon, charge upon charge, argument upon argument, were published by the apologists of the Church in proof and support of the reasonableness, the expediency, the necessity, the duty, the scriptural warranties, the primitive practice of subscriptions to articles of faith. And if from so great a number and variety of powerful arguments, a selection were made of those which were read and referred to, at the time of their publication, as works of the greatest interest and ability, a Volume of Tracts on Clerical Subscription might be formed, of very considerable literary merit, and manifest utility.

Neither was the controversy upon the special subject of ACADEMIC Subscriptions less vigorous in its growth, or less abundant in its produce ; and if the same course were pursued in selecting able arguments upon and in defence of Graduate and Undergraduate Subscriptions at the Universities, a second Volume of Tracts might be formed, which, though not decorated in every instance with the authors' names, (for these writings were very often published without them,) would furnish in the present day a large and salutary supply of sound opinions, exact information, and conclusive reasonings, upon these subjects. A selection of this sort was actually made, and published, in 1772, entitled, "*A collection of papers, designed to explain and vindicate the present mode of Subscription required by the University of Oxford from all young persons at their Matriculation ;*" and little more would be necessary, for the fulfilment of this part of the design, than to reprint what appears to have been very judiciously selected.

It is true, that Subscription at Matriculation is the only subject handled in the arguments of this collection ; but that was the vertical point of the controversy as it had been carried on at Oxford, and as such, was very properly selected for special vindication and defence. It was *Undergraduate Subscription* which had most provoked the hostility of the Socinian, and had most abundantly

supplied the disciples of Blackburne with their topics of declamation. It was this which had been pressed upon the attention of the University before the death of Lord Lichfield, its Chancellor, (Sept. 17, 1772,) and was the first thing of moment which was proposed to its consideration after the installation of his successor, (Oct. 6, 1772.) It was this which had become the subject of universal and almost exclusive discussion in the University, having been thrice introduced into the House of Convocation in 1773; once in a proposition to substitute for Subscription at Matriculation, *a Declaration* of Conformity to the doctrines and discipline of the Church of England; and twice afterwards, in propositions to append *an Epinomis*, or Explanation to the Matriculation Statute, which young students were to read, or to have read to them, at Matriculation. These are the reasons why the whole collection of the Oxford Tracts above referred to was devoted to this argument alone. The Academic questions about Subscription at Cambridge turned almost exclusively upon the practice of subscribing the three Articles of the 36th Canon, as a test of opinion and condition of Graduation upon taking Degrees; at Oxford the propriety of that requisition was never publicly controverted*.

* So says the author of "Reflections on the Impropriety and Inexpediency of Lay-Subscription." P. 29. *I cannot but*

Reference having been thus made to the questions argued at Cambridge, in order to shew their great difference from the questions discussed at Oxford, it may be a fit opportunity to observe, that when Cambridge had substituted the declaration, "*I am bonâ fide a member of the Church of England as by law established,*" instead of a Subscription to the three Articles of the 36th Canon, upon taking a Degree, that University found, at the very first working of the substituted formulary, that they were just as far as ever from satisfying the cravings of Liberalism ; the Infidels and Rationalists, at whose instance this concession had been made, thought the declaration as narrow and illiberal as the subscription, and, like the Arians of old, demanded some larger and more indefinite expression of religious, or rather irreligious, opinion. The Grace which proposed the substitution passed the Senate *June 23, 1772* ; and six months afterwards, *17th January, 1773*, Blackburne's own son, and probably at his father's suggestion, refused to make the *bonâ fide declaration*, tendering to the astonished Vice-Chancellor another in lieu of it ; "*I, Thomas Blackburne, do hereby declare my full persuasion of the truth of the Christian Religion as exhibited in the Scriptures ; and that I have hitherto observe, that our writers on the side of Subscription have confined themselves entirely to Matriculation.*"

communicated with the Established Church, and have no present intention of communicating with any other." This substitute for the Academic substitute was of course rejected, and Thomas Blackburne lost his B.A. degree, not, however, without the most copious discharges of abuse against the illiberality of Church-of-Englandism, and the intolerance of Cambridge. One of these Arian or Socinian railers, not without some humour, calls the *bonâ fide* substitute for Subscription, *idem Monachus sed alio cucullo indutus*. Priestley, Lindsey, Jebb, Blackburne, and the rest, combine their sarcasms to make it contemptible: one considers it a proof, "*that narrow-minded orthodoxy, equipped with brief authority, is loath to depart from its intrenchments;*" another calls it "*an Academic Shibboleth;*" another says of it, "*that the cause of religious despotism scarcely suffers from the change.*" It was reviled "*as an insidious substitution,*" a "*dexterous manœuvre,*" "*an alteration in form but not in spirit;*" and Blackburne, concentrating his bitterness, pronounces it to be "*a coup de maitre, which perhaps was never outdone by the most refined politician in an Italian conclave.*" In short, nothing appears to have been gained by this attempt to conciliate the Rationalists and Free-thinkers but greater bitterness of accusation and new forms of reproach; and if the ill-success of

this attempt at accommodation be duly weighed, and the increased resentment produced by it, they will not fail to produce the conviction, that nothing will satisfy the belligerent and rapacious theology of these Reformers, but the abrogation of all tests as to the *quid*, *quale*, and *quantum* of an Academic's religion.

But to return from this digression, the object and occasion of this Pamphlet will be still farther elucidated, if there be added, a short narrative of the transactions which took place in and out of Convocation during the years 1772, 1773. Such a narrative will not only shew the solicitude of the Academic body to give the subject the fullest and most serious consideration, but will also serve to prove the unshaken firmness of the University in maintaining its ancient discipline in all those particulars, which were deemed essential to *good and godly learning*, in other words, to the attainment of those ends which had been prescribed to the vigilance of the University, by its great Act or Charter of Incorporation, 13 Eliz.

The narrative, to follow the order of proceedings, should begin early in March, 1772, about six months before Lord Lichfield's death, when (and, as it has been said, at his request) the University appointed a delegacy of nine to examine records, and ascertain how far its power extended relative to changes or alterations in the

matter of Subscription. The same course, about the same time, had been adopted at Cambridge upon the recommendation of its Chancellor, the Duke of Grafton. A year afterwards, that is, about six months after Lord Lichfield's death, and about five months after the installation of his successor Lord North, a proposal was submitted to Convocation on the 4th of February, 1773, to substitute, as had been done at Cambridge in the case of Bachelors seven months before, a *declaration* of conformity to the worship and liturgy of the Church of England for a subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles at Matriculation. Some excellent speeches are said to have been made upon the occasion, but the House would not consent to any alteration; the proposed formulary itself did not even come into discussion, for the whole time and attention of Convocation were occupied upon previous questions, and matters relating to the principles of the proposed measure, and the powers of the Academic body.

In the following month, notice was sent to the Colleges, that a Convocation would be holden on Wednesday, the 3d day of March, 1773, at 12 o'clock, when it would be proposed to subjoin the following *Explanation* to the Statute *De tempore et conditionibus Matriculationis*, Tit. ii. §. 3. "Ad eximendum omnem scrupulum circa sensum hujus statuti, notandum hic voluit Academia,

nihil aliud intendi per subscriptionem supradictam, quam ut ii, qui in Matriculam Universitatis redigendi accedunt, hâc subscriptione testantur, se esse de Ecclesiâ Anglicanâ, et nullam doctrinam tenere, quantum ipsi sciunt, contrariam doctrinis in eâdem receptis, necnon se fore conformes, quamdiu in Academiâ vixerint, cultui et liturgiæ istius Ecclesiæ prout ea nunc legibus est stabilita. Ne vero hoc Statutum, aut minus innotescat, aut perperam intelligatur, omnes scholares matriculandi hanc explicationem coram Vice-Cancellario legere, vel lectam audire tenentur." No sooner had the proposed *Explanation*, or *Epinomis*, been brought to the knowledge of Members of Convocation by the Vice-Chancellor's notices, than some queries were drawn up, and presented to his consideration. " 1. Whether there is any real difference between the late proposal of repealing this Statute and the proposed method of explaining it? 2. Whether, supposing a difference . . . they are not both . . . expressly repugnant to Tit. x. §. 2? 3. Whether the present proposed Latin formulary is not the same in sense with the English one, that has already received the *negative* of a very great majority of Convocation? 4. Whether the Latinity is not such as, in the exercise of a boy at Westminster, would expose him to severe corporal correction?

5. Whether it is not unprecedented, and contrary to common justice, to propose again hastily, and, as far as appears, *mero motu*, a matter that has so recently received a solemn determination?

6. Whether, if it were thought expedient, that a matter of so much consequence should be reconsidered, we ought not in such a case to follow the example of our superiors BY A CALL OF THE HOUSE AND TIMELY NOTICE, in order to take the sense of the whole University?

7. Whether the Vice-Chancellor is not, in his own conscience, convinced, THAT IF ALL THE COUNTRY CLERGYMEN WHO HAVE BEEN EDUCATED HERE HAD VOTES IN CONVOCATION, the matter would not be rejected fifty to one? 8. Whether this proposal will not bring discredit and disquietude to the author of it, and to the University? 9. Whether therefore the question ought not to be withdrawn, and notice given accordingly by advertisement in the public prints?"

These points of enquiry seem to have produced a postponement of the day originally fixed for holding a Convocation; instead of the 3d of March, as originally notified, it was held on the 18th. But before the question was put in the usual way, three members of the House spoke in succession against the legality of the whole proceeding. No attempt was made to vindicate it from the charge, and the Vice-Chan-

cellor, perhaps to gain time to consider these unforeseen objections, dissolved Convocation without putting the question. The matter, however, did not end here ; for the proposed *Epinomis* was again submitted to Convocation, Wednesday, March 30, 1773, when, after a long discussion, it was finally rejected by a very large majority.

Such are some of the facts, as collected from the Periodicals of the day, which the Editor has thought it useful to prefix to Dr. Horne's Letter. With respect to the argument itself, he shall leave it in the hands of the able Letter-writer ; but with these observations : that the extreme youth of students at the time of their Matriculation can no longer be urged against Subscription ; that the religious instruction which they now receive from their teachers, before they enter the University, is such as enables them to understand, and with suitable and sufficient knowledge to bear witness to, their belief of the doctrines of the Church of England, as set forth in the Thirty-nine Articles, and to give a promise of conformity to its discipline and worship ; that before they are called upon to subscribe, their College Tutors ascertain, by interrogatory and otherwise, the suitableness and sufficiency of the knowledge which they have attained, in other words, their religious qualifications to give the required testimony as to their Church-member-

ship; and, lastly, it must be remembered, that many elementary books on the Thirty-nine Articles have been published, *in usum Juventutis Academicæ*, since those of Welchman and Veneer, and that these later works are admirably adapted to their purpose of conveying to the Student, in the shortest and simplest form, the knowledge necessary for the right understanding of the Thirty-nine Articles, and a conscientious Subscription to them.

In a late discussion in the House of Lords upon the subject of Undergraduate Subscription, it would perhaps have been better, if the Right Rev. and very able and eloquent vindicator of the Oxford Requisition had taken his ground upon some or all of these topics, instead of resting exclusively upon that which used to be called Archdeacon Powell's argument, (as having been introduced by that very orthodox as well as philosophic divine, at the close of his Discourse on Clerical Subscription at Cambridge, 1757;) namely, the argument *ex auctoritate*. As Dr. Powell's adversaries have so often sought to make him and his argument contemptible by piecemeal quotations of what he said, it is but an act of justice to subjoin the whole of it. "But many of those, who are called upon to subscribe, it is urged, have neither the age nor the learning necessary to make them competent

judges of such abstruse points ; their weakness is imposed upon ; they assent before they have examined. And without question these nice casuists could as easily have shewn the impiety of teaching children the Creed. A public confession of our faith, they might say, is a solemn thing ; some parts of it they will not understand till after many years, some perhaps never. All this would be very true, but very trifling. Every one perceives, that a Creed in the mouths of children is not a testimony of their assent. On such subjects they are unable to speak either truth or falsehood : but from those who have advanced a little farther into life, a little more may be expected. They may acknowledge themselves members of the Church of *England* ; and declare, that they have no objection to her Articles, but a belief of them grounded *on the authority of others*. And nothing farther, I suppose, does any man conceive to be meant by their subscriptions." Discourses on various subjects, by Wm. Samuel Powell, D.D. Archdeacon of Colchester, and Master of St. John's College, Cambridge, p. 40. ed. 1776.

It was not to be wondered at, that such an argument should have been scoffed at, upon the occasion alluded to, by him who seems to be an enemy to all authoritative instruction, whether it be given in the nursery, the school, the Univer-

sity, or the Church. In spite, however, of such mockery, it is asserted, that the argument *ex auctoritate* is a good one; that there is and ever must be an assent of faith, as well as an assent of knowledge; an assent of faith arising out of reliance upon the testimony of others; an assent of knowledge, produced by personal assurance of the truth of facts, or opinions after previous search and verification. There is nothing unreasonable in the principle, nor unusual in the practice, for individuals to declare their conscientious convictions in the truth of a thing or things affirmed, or of a thing or things denied, without being at the time of such declaration possessed of the proof, or series of proofs, whereby such affirmations or negations are to be established as truths. For these conscientious convictions may be obtained by other ways than personal acquaintance with proofs and evidences; for instance, from our trust in the known probity, approved knowledge, disinterested friendship, and unblemished character of him who informs or teaches us, it may be a parent, guardian, pastor, teacher, tutor, friend; and if the truths so told or taught be the same which holy men of old have signed with their hands and sealed with their blood, the same which the national Church has ever taught and continues to teach, and which the wisest

and the best of her sons receive, maintain, defend, these convictions may rise so high in the scale of intellectual and moral assurance, as to amount to full and entire assents or acquiescences of the mind, without any thing of popish subjection, either of the will or understanding; still are they no more than reliances upon testimony. They are all built upon authority; but then it is such an authority, as it would be injustice to suspect, and insanity to deny, founded as it is upon the natural relations of life, sanctioned by the express declarations of Scripture, and required by the manifest interests of society.

But though the argument from authority be so good in itself, and so appropriate upon this question, it must be repeated, that the more advanced age of most young men at the time of their Matriculation, and the more exact and extensive religious knowledge which they possess, and the fuller instruction which they have received from the schoolmaster, and the more searching enquiries made by the College tutor, before they are called upon to subscribe, when compared with what used to be the case in each of these particulars at the date of the old philippics against Undergraduate Subscription, all serve to shew, that there are a great many other important arguments, besides the *argumentum ex auc-*

toritate, whereby the practice of Oxford may be vindicated and commended.

The enemy can no longer insist, as he used to do, upon the deplorable ignorance of the subscribers, upon their childhood, as boys of 16, upon their total want not only of all knowledge of the Articles of religion, but of all the necessary means of obtaining it, upon the absence of all desire on the part of the Academic authorities, to urge the necessity of previous information, or facilitate the acquirement of it. These and similar imputations, not altogether true at any time, are positively false and calumnious in the present day. Undergraduate Subscription, according to the present practice, is agreeable to Reason and Scripture, conducive to sound speech and opinion in respect of the great fundamental truths of Christianity, serviceable as the means of effecting an union between true religion and useful learning, subsidiary to moral and religious improvement, and powerfully promotes peace and harmony among those who, having entered into the same covenant by *one baptism*, ought to hold *one faith*, worship *one Lord*, and *walk unto the house of God in company*.

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A

LETTER

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

THE LORD NORTH,

&c.

MY LORD,

I AM a Member of Convocation in the University of Oxford, and, though solicited by a friend for another Candidate, and by no one for you, took a considerable journey, for the purpose of giving you such a testimony of my approbation, as the occasion offered. This is not said with any view of paying court to your Lordship. You will never know, or see, or hear of, the person who now addresses you. The motive of my journey was to pay you a small part of my share of the nation's gratitude, for your spirited and successful application of your great abilities to the controlling of the dangerous tumults of a

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profligate faction, and for your steadiness in fixing, and retaining upon the most detestable of all men living, that brand of infamy which he so righteously had deserved.

But, My Lord, civil merit is not all that I am willing to attribute to you. I wish to compare you, throughout, with the most upright, orthodox, religious Minister that ever revered and upheld Monarchy, and its surest support the Church of England. Your Lordship sees that I mean the great Earl of Clarendon. He perceived, and convinced his master of the dangerous consequences of believing the strongest professions of the Presbyterians, (whose faction, he tells us, is their religion,) and of making them the smallest concessions. And the effect of those large ones that have been indulged them since his time—the insolence with which they have unmasked themselves to let us know, that, with all their Hoadleian cant of setting up Christ and his Gospel as the only head and code of his Church, they are no better than determined enemies to both—affords the most illustrious testimony of the penetrating sagacity of that great statesman.

Their efforts have all along been aiming at the subversion of Establishments, and the removing of Creeds and Articles: the plain consequence of

which would be, that as many Creeds and systems of Articles would arise among us, as there are men who pretend to speculate* the holy Scriptures. For should no form of sound words, no ὑποτύπωσις τῶν λόγων ὑγιαίνοντων, be proposed to the faith of the members of a Christian Church, an assembly of lions, wolves, and tigers could not be more furious and disorderly than such a Church would be. Its members could be expected to agree in nothing properly Christian, except in the name, I mean the systems of letters that compose the name of Jesus Christ. His nature, his errand, his doctrines would be interpreted and taught with a fatal variety, even against the plainest evidence of scope, context, expression, and parallel passages of Scripture. And what would become of the *truth*, which, according to our Redeemer's account, can only *set us free* from sin and destruction, and which is essentially confined to one single precision, amidst so wild an uproar of jarrings and contradictions?

But where, after all, is this *truth* to be found? And is a civil society sure to find it, because it has the power to establish for its members a set

* speculate upon the holy Scriptures. EDIT.

of religious principles, and a mode of worship? The answer is, that if such a society enquire after the truth with a sufficiently reverential attention to that everlasting Gospel, where it resides, and with a due application to God for the guidance of his holy Spirit in the important task; it has the greatest reason to hope for success. At all events, that state that would be thought to profess Christianity, seems to be under a necessity of establishing *some* profession of faith, *some* mode of worship, and of protecting and encouraging those who follow and embrace them, to the utter discouragement of all who reject them. If, when convinced itself of the truth and rectitude of this profession and mode, it suffer the teachers of those who dissent^a from them to neglect such

^a This was the principle upon which the Toleration Act was drawn up in 1689, in favour of Dissenters; it made a distinction between the essentials and non-essentials of the Christian Religion, between the doctrinal and disciplinarian Articles of the Church of England; and whilst it relieved dissenting teachers from the necessity of subscribing to the 34th Article "of the Traditions of the Church," 35th "of the Homilies," 36th "of the Consecration of Bishops and Ministers," and the first clause of the 20th "of the Authority of the Church," it made it obligatory upon those teachers to subscribe to the others as necessary Articles of Christian faith and doctrine. In process of time, these requi-

parts of the former as do not seem strictly essential to the being of Christianity, and to frame a form of worship, or to reject all forms as they think fit, it acts with a moderation that ought to satisfy, and even gratify, the recusants. But if it extend its indulgence so far as to suffer its Articles of Religion and its form of worship to be unreservedly vilified, and treated, daily and hourly, with the grossest abuses, and even charged with blasphemy; and such doctrines to be openly avowed as, according to its own faith, are no better than downright blasphemies; it then exceeds the bounds of moderation, and falls into that extreme of *semperlenity** and unconcern for the honour of our God and Saviour, which forebode the downfall of that Religion, which it has, on the most convincing reasons, espoused.

I cannot, My Lord, forbear to say, that this is the very state and condition of our established

sitions were almost universally neglected, so that before they were repealed, they had become obsolete enactments. The orthodox dissenting congregations generally complained of this neglect on the part of their ministers, attributing the growth of Socinianism and Arianism among them to the looseness of their ministers' opinions on fundamental points, and to their non-subscription. EDIT.

* for *semperlenity*, read *superlenity*. EDIT.

Religion at present. It is become the public subject of daily, blasphemous invective. And therefore, as the tumultuous licence of the times puts all legal punishment out of the question; the only method left us to secure our religious Establishment, if indeed we are anxious to secure it, is to exert our warmest zeal in defending its principles, and not to suffer the plausible suggestions of its adversaries to make the least successful advance towards overturning it.

No one is ignorant, that the infidel spirit of the times, joined to the fatal indifference seen in many of those on whose zeal for our religious constitution its safety entirely depends, have of late given encouragement to many insolent efforts of its avowed enemies.

To the lasting disgrace of this age, a body of our Clergy, smaller, one would hope, in number^b

^b The number was represented to be 250, but some of the associated (as their Petition represents) were of the profession of Civil Law and Physic. They met for the first time at the Feathers' tavern, Strand, July 17, 1771. At their second meeting, September 25, they agreed to petition Parliament. At their third meeting, December 11, they settled a circular to explain the objects of the Association. It was drawn up by Mr., afterwards Dr. Jebb, M.D. of Peter-house. And at their last meeting, January 23, 1772, it was resolved "to present their Petition to the

than they have been represented, have presumed to petition the Legislature to set free all the Clergy, for the time to come, from those solemn obligations into which they had, themselves, voluntarily entered, and to leave the Church of England destitute, for the future, of any marks or characters whereby it may be distinguished from a den of thieves. The Dissenters, at the

House of Commons as early as possible that session." It was so presented by Sir William Meredith, February 6, 1772. But the anti-subscriptionists were not unanimous. Some who embarked in this cause, such as Watson, Paley, Wollaston, were observed afterwards to secede from these ultra-proceedings, urging the propriety of submitting their complaints to the Episcopal Bench. Those who were of this opinion, (among whom we find the name of Porteus,) met at Archbishop Tennison's library, refusing to hold any intercourse with the Feathers-men, who in their turn refused to speak of the seceders in terms of common civility, denouncing them as "Apostate Whigs." This merciless denomination seems to have stung Watson, who thereupon wrote his two letters, (the last to Sir George Savile,) under the signature of "the Christian Whig." The result of the application to the Bishops is reported by Bp. Porteus. See Hodgson's *Life of Porteus*, p. 35. Archbishop Cornwallis in the name of his brethren replied, Feb. 11, 1773. "I have consulted severally my brethren, the Bishops, and it is the opinion of the Bench in general, that nothing can in prudence be done in the matter that has been submitted to their consideration." EDIT.

same time, have ridiculously been pleading, (like the poor Frenchman, who, when arrested for a just debt, told the officer "he would have nothing to do with the law,") that since they have always remonstrated against the Articles of the Church of England, they ought not to be subject to any subscription to them^c. As if the Legislature had not evidently, and as if it were not their wisdom to exert, a right of prescribing the condition on which they, who undertake to instruct her subjects in Religion, shall be admitted to that office.

* There were great differences of opinion among the Dissenters, upon the propriety of altering the Toleration Act in this particular of Subscription to the doctrinal Articles of the Church of England. When in the year 1773, Parliament, upon petitions from Dissenters, took it into consideration, counter-petitions were also presented; the orthodox Dissenters were generally in favour of the Subscription required of their teachers under the Toleration Act, namely, a Subscription to all the fundamental verities of the Gospel, and especially the Trinitarian verities; and so peremptory were some of the orthodox Dissenters against those of the Free-thinking, Arian, and Socinian class, that they insisted upon being heard by counsel against this pretended measure of relief. Mr., afterwards Sir W. Chambers, the Vinerian Professor, was accordingly heard as counsel on their behalf at the bar of the House. The measure was, however, carried in the House of Commons by a majority of 65 to 14. But it was lost in the House of Lords by a majority of 102 to 29. EDIT.

As modestly might a tribe of Indian priests pray to be licensed to set up schools and churches in England; and plead, at the same time, that, as they declare against the principles of Christianity, it will be but reasonable to permit them to preach their own heathen doctrines without control.

Nor is this parallel exaggerated. Experience has shewn us, that the general connivance which has been indulged to the Dissenters with regard to that part of the Articles^d to which the law requires their subscription, has been attended with the most pernicious consequences.

^d The author alludes to the great growth of Arian and Socinian doctrines which took place among the Dissenters, and which greatly alarmed and distressed the non-conformists of the old school. When they saw such men as Kippis, Lardner, Leland, and even Watts, shaken in the firmness of their belief in some of the most important of the Trinitarian truths, the dissenting congregations began to fear, that they should have no security for the soundness of their ministers' faith, if they were released from their obligation to subscribe the doctrinal Articles of the Church of England. The discussion upon the subject at Salters' Hall, London, and also at Exeter, are full of interest, not only by reason of the ability shewn, and the soundness of the arguments for the necessity of believing in the Trinitarian mysteries, but specially because they prove the agreement of the orthodox among Churchmen and Dissenters, in their religious convictions upon these foundation truths of Christianity. EDIT.

Every dissenting teacher, however he cries out against established systems, hath a system of his own conceits, which he vends to his audience, as the dictates of the Gospel; though, for the most part, they are total negations of all its essential, fundamental doctrines. And let any one read the horrid effusions of the pragmatistical Coryphæus^e of the present race of Dissenters, relating to Christianity, and he will think it want of charity to suppose, that the wretch could possibly have poured forth so much blasphemy, if he had lain, as he ought by the requisition of the law to have lain, under the restraint of a subscription to our Articles. It is said, he has now got a better trade in his hands than that of blaspheming; and the best thanks of every Christian are eminently due to the noble Lord, who, no doubt with a pious

^e Dr. Priestley. The steps from latitudinarianism to infidelity have been gradual, but progressive. John Hales, Chillingworth, Fowler, Whitby, Whiston, Clarke, Hoadley, Blackburne, Law, Jebb, Lindsey, present examples of this gradual degeneracy, or rather degradation, of religious opinion. Among the Dissenters there were found the like progressive deteriorations, of faith and doctrine, till at last, the whole body of Presbyterians became so corrupted by heretical pravity, that they now (with few exceptions) present the painful picture of a great revolt, not simply from the Articles, Directory, and Catechism of the Westminster Assembly, but from all the saving and sanctifying truths of the Gospel. EDIT.

intention, has found a more innocent employment for this busy infidel, than that of reviling the Religion brought down from heaven by the Son of God.

But of all the attacks that have been made upon our ecclesiastical constitution, (which though now abused by its bitter enemies with impunity, and deserted by its pretended friends, was, in better times, held forth as approaching, nearer than all others, to the apostolical model,) none is more alarming than that which immediately relates to our Universities.

These illustrious seats of learning, were originally constructed with a view to their being seminaries for the profession of true Religions also. Most of the Colleges were founded by ecclesiastical persons, who, as well as the lay founders, have generally required the members of their several societies to be trained up for instructors in religious principles, and, in due time, to take upon them holy Orders. And this purpose hath, as it ought, been all along piously attended to. Every member of the University, even he who hath attained his fifteenth year, is considered by the wisdom of our ancestors as a religious person, and is required solemnly to adopt and profess the principles of the Church of England, as contained in the Thirty-nine Articles.

And, My Lord, are not these Articles supposed to exhibit the principles of every one who professes himself a member of the Church of England? And though it seems impossible to obtain the like subscription from those members of the Church who live at large, and belong to no particular society; are they not all equally bound to acknowledge these doctrines? And would not the abolishing this subscription, where it has been solemnly established, and unimpeachably practised, ever since the year 1581¹; would not, I say,

¹ Before 1581, it was not thought necessary to give any instructions to the University about Subscription; but positive separation from the Church of England had now shewn itself for the first time since its settlement, in the instance of the Brownists, and all the elements of religious discord were at work. Lord Leicester was Chancellor of Oxford at this time. When Whitgift became Archbishop in 1583, the Queen charged him to "restore the discipline of the Church, and the Uniformity established by law, which had been deranged by the connivance of some prelates, (Archbishop Grindal *inter alios*,) the obstinacy of the Puritans, and the power of some noblemen." Subscription at the University was a tutelary and defensive measure: it was to save the inexperienced and unprepared from the insidious and subtle assaults of the disciplinarians and the other enemies of the Church of England, who though they had unmasked their malignity ten or twelve years before, had now assumed that attitude of hostility, which they never ceased to maintain, till

this abolition look like an express, formal release from all obligation of assent to these doctrines? Would it not seem a tacit signification to our youth, that they are at liberty to think of Religion as they please, and as whim and fancy, their own or that of others, may lead them? "Your predecessors in this place have been required to declare for these doctrines of this Church in which you have been baptized and catechised. They were put under a necessity of subscribing to certain Articles, exhibiting, as we, indeed, profess to believe, the genuine doctrines of the Gospel; agreed upon in the year 1562, and enjoined to be received in the Church of England, as the only means *for avoiding diversities of opinion, and for the establishing of consent touching true Religion.* But your present governors in the University and in the State have discovered

they had overthrown the Church in 1645, and with it all the ancient and characteristic institutions of the country. Lord Leicester's application to Convocation stands upon the Convocation Register, thus: "Anno Domini 1581, secundo Novembris in celebri Convocatione Magistrorum Regentium et Non-Regentium habita, lectæ erant literæ ab insignissime Comite Leycestrîæ, Cancellario nostro ad venerabilem Convocationem hoc exemplo subscriptæ." It should be also borne in mind, that Nonconformity had been making progress in Oxford since the days of Humphreys, Rainolds, and Sampson.

EDIT.

this to be all a wrong measure. It is now determined to be inexpedient and even absurd (though we have not *yet* forbidden *catechising*) to prepossess young minds in favour of *any* religious principles. You are now to be left to judge for yourselves, or, if you choose it, not to think at all about them; (for your tutor's lectures, if he shall choose to lecture you, in the Articles, will not oblige you to assent to them;) nor, unless you shall happen hereafter to take Degrees in the University, will we suppose you to be members of our Church, or more than Christians at large, without any determinate Christian principles. Do as you please with your religious sentiments. Harken, without reproach of conscience, as you happen to be disposed, either to Socinians, Arians, Papists, Presbyterians, Quakers, or Anabaptists. Unless you stay amongst us to a Degree, you are at liberty, from any restraint on our part, to enlist yourselves under any of their banners. You are also free to declare yourselves members of the Church of England; but we, however the University was originally established as a religious nursery, and however it exists now in that capacity with regard to our national Church, we, to let the world see our attachment to religious liberty, will not say one word, nor do

one act, to induce you to choose the principles of this Church, preferable to any other principles." Such is the language in which the governors of the University must be supposed to address their novices, as soon as the statute shall be abolished requiring their subscription to the *Articles*. And though I will not deny that the harangue is founded upon the principles of what Hoadley taught us to call *religious liberty*, I will venture to say, it has not the least tincture of *Religion* in it. It has, till now, been the opinion of all who are in earnest about Religion, that it cannot too early be inculcated into young minds; and the catechising children hath for this reason uniformly been the practice of the Christian Church; and of this Church in particular, till the itch, now pretty well appeased, of hearing trim afternoon essays, miscalled lectures, entirely supplanted it in the metropolis. Is a child more capable of comprehending the grounds of the doctrines of the Catechism, than a youth of fifteen is capable of judging of the foundations upon which the doctrines of the *Articles* are constructed? And yet the child, without any prohibition from the governors of our Church, is permitted to be taught this formulary, almost as soon as he can lisp it out: and in spite of the principles of

religious liberty opposed to this practice, the design of it seems yet to be, that the child may be habituated to think favourably of the doctrines of our Church, before other principles and notions may be offered to him to divert him into the destructive paths of heresy, or schism, or infidelity. It is then, it seems, allowable to give children this prepossession, while they are children; but then, when they come to the University, this childish prepossession must be removed. All principles of Religion must, by an academical act, be removed out of their way, and the doctrines, contained alike in the Catechism and the Articles, are to be declared unnecessary to be professed any longer. If this were not intended by the alteration proposed, where would be the harm of addressing such young men as are to be matriculated, after reading the Thirty-nine Articles with them, in the following style:

“ You are now about to become a member of a religious society, the chief seminary of the Church of England. This Church, of which you have been a member from your baptism, has, upon a diligent perusal of the holy Scriptures, drawn from thence a set of Articles, containing the fundamental doctrines expressed or implied in those Scriptures, and declaring against some

notorious errors, chiefly of the Church of Rome, which stand in plain opposition to the Gospel, and to the doctrine and practice of the primitive Church in its highest antiquity. The wisdom of our predecessors who compiled these Statutes, thought it expedient that some sort of declaration should be made by all members of the University at their Matriculation, that they profess themselves members of the Church of England, for whose honour and support its whole structure is calculated. What more natural profession hereof can be made, than that of subscribing your name to the abovementioned doctrines, as a token that you believe, from the authority of Scripture concerning the most important of them, from the reverence with which they have always been received by wiser folks than yourselves, and from the general acknowledgment of the truth of the bulk of them till lately^s, even among the Dissenters, (whose teachers are obliged by law to subscribe to all but a small part of them,) that they are faithfully drawn from the holy Scriptures, and that they reasonably oppose certain doctrines censured in them, as evidently contrary to the word of God."

^s As the law then stood, the Dissenting ministers were wont to say, that they subscribed to 35 Articles and a half.

Such a réquisition as this would have met with no reprehension, in times when scepticism, and its offspring, infidelity, had not arrogantly brought every religious subject under discussion, beginning at God, and running on through all his words and works. But the times are changed. Our forefathers were a generation of weak and credulous men : what was highly esteemed among them, is abomination in the sight of their wiser descendants. We are so sure that they were in the wrong, since the illumination which the Church, the State, and the University received from the *Confessional*^h, that we are taking hasty strides towards the total abolition of those Articles, which were formerly esteemed the *decus columenque* of all three. For it cannot be imagined, that the spectre, which has put our governors in so terrible a fright, will haunt us no more, after the present point is gained. The ab-

^h " Blackburne's *Confessional* certainly produced very remarkable effects. It was an argument which could not fail to be popular, as it was addressed to that love of liberty which, under due control, had been the parent of so much good, by leading to the overthrow of civil and religious tyranny in 1688, but which, by running into dissoluteness of opinion and licentiousness of conduct, had previously produced the civil and religious tyranny of 1649. This book became the rallying point of all the freethinkers of the day. EDIT.

surdity of Subscription, once established in one instance, will be urged with a zeal animated by success, in another instance. Arguments *equally forcible* will be urged against the subscription of Candidates for Graduatcy; and who knows, whether, at some period, under less watchful guardians than the Church is at present blest with, the example of the University of Oxford may not be alleged and admitted as an argument against all Subscription? that infidels, heretics, and schismatics of all denominations, of all opinions, may verify in this nation, what David so anxiously dreaded for his own; that they who have all along, almost ever since Calvin spawned the motley race, been saying, louder than in their hearts, "Come, and let us root them out, that they be no more a people;" that they, "the tabernacles of the Edomites and the Ishmaelites, the Moabites and the Hagarenes, Gebal and Ammon and Amalek, the Philistines, with the Tyrians, Assur, and the children of Lot, may take the houses of God in possession."

The revolted two hundred and fifty¹ Church of England Clergy (if there were so many) believed

¹ Nothing was omitted on the part of the Feathers' Associ-

they failed of success in their petition for a total abolition of the Articles, from several obstacles which time may remove ; a second, or third, or fourth attempt (for vermin are never weary of gnawing their passage through all obstacles) may prove successful. When the Universities, the seminaries of the Church, and the genuine repositories of true Religion as well as sound learning, shall have given up all, or even a part, of their wonted concern for securing the principles, and “ for establishing the consent” of their members, “ touching true religion,” the reason will seem to have ceased for requiring any Subscriptions at all. “ The young academics,” it may be urged, “ are, many of them, intended for holy Orders, and yet it is not thought ne-

ation to obtain success. An able committee ; regular meetings ; papers skilfully drawn up ; petitions true to the doctrines of the Confessional ; a strong party both in and out of the House of Commons ; all seemed to indicate a successful result. But when their opinions were to be acted upon, it was found that these anti-subscriptionists differed from each other, the majority condemning, not subscription to this or that set of Articles, but all sorts of subscription ; and consenting to nothing in this way but a declaration, that they believed Scripture to be the word of God, or some other loose and equivocal assertion of the same or equal latitude. EDIT.

cessary to engage *their* attachment, even to that system of principles which the Church of England hath adopted. They are not *now* required to declare, or even to know any thing about these Articles. The Universities judge it sufficient that they are supposed to be *Christians*; they require no token of their professing the doctrines of our national Church. And if so, where is the consistency of so scrupulous a care that the people in other parts of the nation should be taught in our churches, only according to that system of propositions, from the profession of which, the Universities have thought fit to discharge their members, whom their statutes had obliged to it, and many of whom are to be trained up as instructors in the Established Church." Such will be the reasoning of the petitioners on occasion of our abolishing the Academical Subscription in question.

Let us here stop a moment, My Lord, to make a short enquiry concerning the effect which this abolishing of Subscription at Matriculation is like to have upon our élèves themselves. The licence and scepticism of the times too often subject them to be present at conversations, where pragmatical old or young men take upon them to discuss and censure, at random, the most im-

portant articles of the Christian faith: and it is not unnatural to suppose, that these discussions and censures may make a deep impression on the minds of young hearers. The heterodox orator comes *prepared* with his arguments, such as they are, against the doctrines of the Church; and ignorance, or modesty, or both, are sure to secure him against all opposition. The majority of the company is probably on his side; and few young academics, though they may suspect, or even discover, chicane and false reasoning in his harangues, have courage enough to give opposition to representations, which all around them seem, by their silent attention, to receive with so entire an approbation. Should, then, this spirit of cavilling at the established doctrines of the Church of England become epidemical amongst our youth, should it become fashionable with them to think every thing wrong, which their graver predecessors established as right and scriptural, how could such a spirit be checked and controlled? Should you expostulate with any of our youth, discovered to be sceptically inclined, and remonstrate* to him that he is opposing himself to the doctrines detailed from the

* for remonstrate read represent. EDIT.

Scriptures in the Articles of the Church of England ; his ready answer would be, " What have I to do with the Articles of the Church of England? The University required and defended *our* Subscription to them as long as it was defensible. But, in the year 1772, they found that the farce would take no longer. In solemn Convocation assembled, they, in that year, repealed the old absurd statute, requiring such Subscription, and left us at liberty to embrace whatever set of religious principles might best agree with our reason. We may now *contemn* those antiquated doctrines,

—Dis ignoscentibus ipsis;

our governors themselves have given us the cue for contemning them ; they dare not even mention them, in the Declaration^k which they have

^k The Declaration here alluded to, is that which was proposed to Convocation, Thursday, February 4, 1773; and, as it has been said, upon the recommendation of Lord North, (see *Gent. Mag.* 1773, p. 100.) who had been installed Chancellor, October 6, 1772. It amounted to a Declaration (in the English language) of conformity to the worship and Liturgy of the Church of England, and was of the same general import with that, which at Cambridge was substituted for Subscription upon taking a Degree. Something has been already said in the preface concerning the mockery and contempt with which this

substituted in the place of our Subscription to them.

I am well aware, as your Lordship will be, that the reasonings I have been detailing, in the persons of the gentlemen at the *Feathers*, and of our academical youth, are by no means conclusive. The propriety of the Subscriptions in question, and even the necessity of them, to the safety of the Church of England, has been clearly set forth and demonstrated, in “¹ An Answer to a Pamphlet, intitled, Reflections on the Impropriety

concession was received by the Socinianizing M.A.'s of Cambridge. In this, read the usual course and consequences of concession; perils surround the steps of those who heedlessly seek to accommodate and so to reconcile the adversary, forgetting what is due to the sacred deposit of Gospel truth, and to the Church which is the guardian and depositary of that truth. EDIT.

¹ This Article is not in the Oxford collection of papers on the Matriculation question, printed 1772. Its main object was to prove the illegality of substituting a *Declaration* for a *Subscription* at Matriculation, “it being utterly inconsistent with our Magna Charta, and consequently with our oath, and as such, it is hoped that it will be rejected by Convocation.” It was rejected by a very large majority. This pamphlet, sets forth “the danger of making concessions to clamour and faction;” it asks, “why needs this University be terrified into a surrender, or any kind of submission, by the

and Inexpediency of Lay-Subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles in the University of Oxford." Yet "this will not convince, although it should convince," our brisk antagonists. And should the proposed abolition of Subscription at Matriculation take place in the University, the conclusions above deduced from that supposed event will readily, weak as they are, pass current, and be loudly insisted on, for disparaging the doctrines of our Church, in a trifling, heedless age, with which, the flimsiest arguments of infidelity have force enough to beat down the strongest "proofs of holy writ."

And thus, it is much to be feared, that your University, My Lord, ever renowned for sober, Christian principles, and for heroic courage in avowing and maintaining them, particularly against the rage and nonsense of fanaticism, menaces of a Sir William Meredith? For be it understood, that those menaces extend far beyond the present subject of debate, our *Undergraduate Subscription* to the Thirty-nine Articles, and will not be appeased by the abolition of it." And are the menaces of a Wilks, a Baines, a Wood in the present day, all of which menaces have ends and purposes far beyond the removal of Academic Tests, to shake the intrepidity, or confound the judgment, of the Universities upon these points? EDIT.

even while it saw *Hannibalem ad portas*;—that this illustrious University is upon the point of furnishing a plea for universal scepticism, for levelling the fences of the Church of England, (whose model is that Apostolic Church which was established under the particular direction of Christ himself,) that the wild boar out of the wood may root up, and the wild beasts of the field may lay waste, “the place of the vineyard which God’s right hand hath planted.”

Still, it will be urged, that the propriety and gravity of truth are always in the first place to be attended to; nor is any advantage to be sought, or accepted, from any measure that may violate it. That if these Subscriptions are wrong in themselves—if there be an absurdity in requiring them—if they justly provoke the general clamour against us—no consideration of mischievous consequences apprehended, ought to have any weight to withhold us from removing scandals and nuisances from our constitution. *Fiat justitia, ruat cælum.*

Permit me, therefore, My Lord, briefly to enquire, What are these dreadful mischiefs so loudly complained of, in our requisition of the Subscription in question to the Thirty-nine

Articles? And if they shall appear to be no other than mere bugbears, let us by no means suffer ourselves to be frightened by them into a compliance with the demands of false representation, and impertinent clamour.

The first objection I shall take notice of, is drawn from the original end and design for which the Thirty-nine Articles were destined by the compilers of them. It is said, that "they were intended for no other purpose, than that they might be subscribed to by preachers and pastors, the teachers of religion; from which provision, a perfect quietness and concord, in religion, was, with the greatest assurance, expected."

But, My Lord, if the orthodoxy of the teachers was looked upon as an effectual mean of general uniformity, we must then suppose, that, in those days, "the Priest's lips" were thought to "preserve knowledge;" and that the people believed it to be their duty "to seek the law at his mouth." And, if this were uniformly the case, if the teacher did, in all parts of the kingdom, ingenuously and conscientiously conform his instructions to the Thirty-nine Articles, as containing the fundamental and essential doctrines of the holy Scriptures, and the people did regularly and humbly resort on Sundays to the

church, to sit under his instructions, nothing more would then perhaps be necessary for the purpose mentioned in the *Title* of the Articles, than the Subscription of the teachers of religion.

But, between the years 1562 and 1581, this provision appears to have been found^m insufficient for effecting its intended purpose. It was there-

^m From the first settlement of the Church, there had been a party in it, enslaved in their consciences to the supremacy of Calvin, both in matters of discipline as well as doctrine. He sat on his throne at Geneva with a triple crown on his head, fulminating against all who dared to depart from his newly-invented platform of Church government. This spiritual thralldom continued to increase, and Presbyterianism (now a bygone and obsolete ism in our land) was then making rapid progress, and threatening to bring about what it afterwards accomplished, the destruction of the Church and Monarchy. Lord Leicester's proposition in 1581, arose out of the necessity of resisting this growing and progressive mischief. It was founded upon the maxim, "*principiis obsta*;" a principle as fit to be acted upon in 1834 as 1581. The malignant industry of the Socinian, rationalist, and free-thinker in the present day, requires check and counteraction, as much as those of the Puritan and Presbyterian; perhaps more so, because these malignants are occupied upon a more fearful object, (the elaborate falsification of the words of Scripture,) seeking by Pseudocriticism to seduce the youthful scholar, and ensnare his conscience by sophistries, which he cannot as yet unravel.

EDIT.

fore thought proper by the Queen and her Ministry, as well as by the governors of the University, to *extend* the obligation to this Subscription, and more particularly to interest every youth of our *religious academical community* in the cause of the Church of England. This measure is perfectly conformable to the expressed design of the *Articles*: “the avoiding diversity of opinions, and the establishing consent touching true religion.” For these expressions in the *Title* of the *Articles* were not intended, I suppose, to be confined to the *opinions* of the Clergy, but to extend to all the members of the Church of England: and every one of them was, no doubt, expected, if not to subscribe to the Articles, yet to receive them, “not as the word of man,” but as declaring the plain and true meaning and import of “the word of God.”

The objection, therefore, in our view, against Academical Subscriptions, viz. “that the Articles were originally meant to be subscribed by the Clergy only,” is not fairly urged, nor is of any weight, even though we grant Clerical Subscription to have been at first supposed to be all that was necessary. It does not, by the *Title* of the Articles, appear to have been the first intention of the then governors in Church

and State, to confine their operation to the Clergy ; and if it had been so, still, when that restriction seemed likely to fail of answering the expectation of government, and the Established Church began to be in danger, schism assailing it on the one side, and Popery on the other,

—hâc lupus, hâc canis—

common prudence could not fail to recommend the extending of Subscription, in such a manner, as might seem best calculated to effect the purpose for which the Articles were compiled ; the securing the interests of the Established Church. And what could be more effectual to that end, than the requiring this Subscription from every member of the great nursery of religion and learning ? From such persons our religious establishment might naturally expect the firmest support, or the deepest detriment ; and no measure could be wiser than to attach them to its cause.

But, My Lord, the most piquant wisdom of a former age may, it seems, grow vapid in process of time ; and the more intense illuminations of reason and learning which we at present enjoy, have thrown the light of our ancestors into the gloom of Egyptian darkness. Unhappily and

disgracefully involved in it by our Academical laws, we are in haste to get out of it, and do not scruple "to own our fathers have been fools too long."

Their folly, we are told, which, however, we did not see, till a club of infidels pointed it out to us, consisted in requiring the Subscription of raw, ignorant boys", a Subscription essentially implying an assent, founded on sober and ac-

" The ignorance of Matriculated and Undergraduate Students in matters of religion generally, as well as specially, and particularly in the Thirty-nine Articles, formed the Achillæan argument of the Blackburnes and Jebbs and Merediths of 1772; but *non valet argumentum ab ignorantia* in 1834; *non valet a juventute*; for though it cannot be said that the young Student even now is master of the metaphysics of the five points, or the unsearchable things of the triune Godhead, (and who is equal to these things?) it can be said, and ought to be constantly affirmed, that his knowledge of the Articles is such in quantity and quality, in suitableness and sufficiency, as to warrant the University in asking of him that testimony of religious opinion, which is given and understood to be given by the act of Subscription. The care now taken of the religious part of a child's education, and his *later* entrance at the University, have effectually deprived the anti-subscriptionist of his favourite point, "how can a child assent to what he has never been taught, and cannot understand;" he now is taught, and does understand. . . EDIT.

curate examination, to certain abstruse doctrines of which they are necessarily ignorant ; and, therefore, are but “scurvily used” by such requisition.

The weight of this exception to our statute, rests on these three points :

I. That the doctrines contained in the Thirty-nine Articles, are abstruse.

II. That the young subscriber is necessarily ignorant of their meaning, and of the proofs of their truth.

III. That his subscription necessarily implies an assent, founded on sober and accurate examination.

First then, let us consider the charge of abstruseness.

The epithet *abstruse* is applied originally to things that are more inwardly reposed, in the penetralia of the places in which they reside, and, as it were, *thrust backwards*, so as not to be obvious to transient and careless observation.

This character is unavoidably applicable to most of the objects that engage our speculation. The causes of things are either entirely hidden from us ; or, if we happen to discover these, yet

their mode of operation will often remain an impenetrable secret. Numberless qualities retire into the penetralia of substances, (which is the case also of the elementary substances,) and are not dragged into light but by accident, or by unwearied experiment.

Thus it is with regard to the elementary substance of fire; dispensed, perhaps, to every thing corporeal, but hid deepest in those substances which are most densely compacted. It is intimately abstruded in what poetical licence terms the *veins* of flint, not to be driven from those recesses but by strong concussions; and it was one of the tasks imposed on man,

Ut silicis venis abstrusum excuderet ignem.

But though the task of tracing natural abstrusenesses to their secret retirements has often been successfully executed, nature has reserved numberless others which mock our deepest researches. And for reasons abundantly more cogent, many declarations and intimations occurring in the Old and New Testaments, are unavoidably *abstruse*; not only to young academics, but to the most inquisitive veterans in learning. The doctrines and facts there set forth, are such as the most penetrating wit of man could never

have guessed at : and because nature and human speculation can exhibit nothing analogous to some of those facts and doctrines, therefore the proud self-confidence of infidelity pronounces them false and absurd. Thus, with regard to the Scripture doctrine of the holy Trinity :—" The whole range of *created* beings," it is urged, " can furnish no instance of three distinct subsistences united in, and equally partaking of, one and the same substance :"—this is most true ; but let us hear the deduction—" *therefore*, it is impossible that the *uncreated* God should subsist in this manner." This is the reasoning of infidelity—" this is her foolishness ; and her disciples praise her saying." And though some have, by partial quotations from, and strained glosses upon, those passages of Scripture, which affirm the doctrine of the holy and undivided Trinity, attempted to explain away the meaning and import of those passages, and affected to reject this important doctrine, upon the authority of the Scriptures ; nothing is more evident, than that this torturing of the sacred text was suggested by the pride and arrogance of human reason, disdaining to admit the reality of any thing whose nature and verity it cannot comprehend".

" It seems sufficiently evident, that the Arians of our days

But this fact being so often in Scripture declared by God himself, it will readily be admitted for a truth by all sober reasoners upon that authority. The *manner* of this triune subsistence will, in the mean time, remain as *abstruse* and untraceable as numberless modes of existence and operation in created nature, which, though inscrutable themselves, produce effects most evident ;

—Causa latet, vis est notissima.

The most incredulous philosophers, nay the divines at the Feathers, contentedly ignorant of the natural cause, will allow the reality of its effects, at the same time that they blasphemously exclaim against a supernatural fact, evidenced again and again by the word of God himself !

But if the Scriptures are, from the nature of many of the subjects they treat of, necessarily *abstruse* ; so also is the divinely dark theology of infidelity in a far higher degree. Its reasonings, which it has sometimes taken the liberty to style demonstrations, are founded upon prin-

do rather rest their rejection of the catholic doctrine of the holy Trinity upon its disagreement with all natural apprehensions and experiences, than upon the deficiency of Scripture-proofs of it. *Original note.*

ciples, established by no one *having authority*, but altogether arbitrarily assumed; and affect to evince, what it calls the “doctrines of natural religion,” such as, an *after-state*, with its *rewards and punishments*, by arguments, in which there are always some propositions, which, if not rested on divine authority, may as reasonably be denied as affirmed. Nor is it credible that any one infidel does, or ever did, believe these great truths in his heart, upon the recommendation of those philosophical demonstrations, which are set up as rivals to the authority of the word of God.

The doctrines set forth in the Thirty-nine Articles are *abstruse* from the same cause that renders the holy Scriptures so. They contain those of the holy Scriptures. But the design of these Articles was, to render those doctrines, if not less *abstruse*, yet more methodical, by collecting the import of various scattered texts of Scripture, into so many distinct points. And if, from the fashion of the times in which they were compiled, some few scholastic expressions occur in them, they may, with the greatest ease, be opened by the tutor, to the apprehension of the youngest academic. And this labour is greatly facilitated by those of several little comments on

the Articles, which have been published for the use of the younger students in divinity, adducing the several texts of Scripture, by which each scriptural article is supported; and referring the young student to those ancient histories and testimonies, by which the truth of those articles that are referred to them is established.

It appears, I trust, by this time, that the circumstance of *abstruseness* in these Articles, is no reason for decrying the Undergraduate-Subscription: especially since the Subscription to the truth of the holy Scriptures, which is recommended in the room of it, is liable to the same objection in a greater degree. Nor can the charge of absurdity be supported against our Statute requiring such Subscription from Undergraduates, unless the second and third objections above mentioned can be maintained. Let us make trial of their force. The second is,

II. That the young Subscriber is necessarily ignorant of the meaning of the Articles to be subscribed, and of the proofs alleged in support of their truth.

My Lord, I will not scruple to assert, that this is an arbitrary and false assertion. The main, fundamental doctrines of our faith are, in the Articles, as clearly expressed, as words can

express them. And the several texts of Scripture, on whose authority these Articles rest, are, as is above observed, to be seen without difficult researches. Nor is it an unreasonable task for the tutor, who is required by one of our statutes to make the Articles the subjects of his lectures, to set these proofs before his pupil in a few hours before his Matriculation. All that seems necessary in this case, is to provide that such instruction^o shall not, on any account, be omitted; but that the tutor shall solemnly declare to the Vice-Chancellor, in a prescribed form of words, that he has carefully read to his pupil, and confirmed by proper citations from the holy Scriptures, and by proper allegations from ecclesiastical history and testimony, the Thirty-nine Articles, to which he is now to subscribe.

The last of the three points implied in the

^o Since this was written, to the old requisitions of the Statutes upon the subject of tutorial duties in respect of religious instruction, there have been added many other direct and indirect obligations of the same sort, some arising out of Academic, and some out of Collegiate, ordinances, but all concurring in this, that is, in imparting to the student so large and exact a knowledge of the Articles of the Church of England, as to silence the old hackneyed argument *ab ignorantia*. EDIT.

exception to our Statute requiring Undergraduate-Subscription, is,

III. That this Subscription necessarily supposes an assent founded on sober and accurate examination.

That an assent is implied in the Subscription, is most certain; and it is as certain, that this assent again implies examination. But examination, My Lord, is an indeterminate word, admitting of various degrees of the mind's application; and the objectors will find it hard, though they talk so plausibly at large, to assign the precise degree of it, below which a rational assent cannot be given. Were it necessary that such an examination should precede that act of the mind, as should extend to every question and scruple that scepticism and infidelity may suggest, a long life would be abundantly too short for the task, and every man would go out of the world a stranger to the fruits and hopes of Christian faith.

Evidently therefore, a limited degree of examination is sufficient to our reasonable assent; and yet, we are still at a loss how we are to mark that degree.

We read in the Acts of the Apostles, (ch. ii.) that three thousand persons assented to and

embraced the Christian doctrine in *one day*, upon the hearing of *one* sermon. What could they examine in that space of time, more than the appositeness of the Scripture-proofs adduced in that sermon, and the reality of the miracle they had heard with their ears, and of that capital one of the resurrection, Peter had evidenced to them. The same miracles, the same Scripture-proofs, in conjunction with many other, solicit our assent to the doctrines contained in the Articles. And if it be replied, that the miracle of *speaking with tongues* addressed itself immediately to the senses of this multitude, and therefore could not fail of convincing them: I answer, first, that it did fail of convincing, perhaps, a greater multitude, equally witnesses of it, who chose to ascribe it to the influence of new wine. And secondly, that however men of reason and shrewdness may despise those who do not, in the case of miracles, attribute a force to the evidence of the senses, superior to that of traditional evidence, the Saviour of the world was of another mind. He plainly gives the greater merit to that faith, which admits, without a pause, the report of sober witnesses: "Thomas, saith he, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have be-

lieved." A standing demonstration of the gross folly of philosophical calculations, instituted and applied to Scripture facts, for determining the degrees of probability, arising from nearer and from more distant evidence !

But what will our rational philosophic examiners say to the faith inculcated into the hearts of multitudes, by the preaching of John the Baptist ? John, as the Scripture informs us, " did no miracle," and yet the people, in vast crowds, flocked to his Sermons on repentance, and " were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins." And we no where read, that they were condemned as over-hasty in yielding their assent to his mere declarations concerning the near approach of the Messiah. He might, indeed, allege some or all the prophecies predicting *his* coming ; but his followers had not, till long after, opportunity of *examining* whether those Scriptures had reference to Jesus Christ or not. Nay, the most learned among that people at that time, the Scribes and Doctors of the law, the professed *examiners* of the Scriptures, could never be brought, even by his astonishing miracles, to receive him for the promised Messiah, whom he declared himself to be. Examination has no end with those who are dis-

posed to demur, and to wait till the everflowing river is all gone by. But the unphilosophical, well-meaning hearers of the Baptist, made no delay to come to a resolution, upon grounds for which the *petitioning* gentry would despise them; though the Saviour of the world gave the highest sanction to those grounds, by submitting himself to the baptism with which they had been baptized.

The Scriptures alleged for the truth of our Articles, are more decisive than those then unfulfilled prophecies by which John supported his exhortations; and are abundantly sufficient to convince, if not the men of reason, that *bellua multorum capitum*, yet every sincere, well-meaning enquirer. And, unless the unchanging God has changed his plan, a degree of examination not inferior to that which he approved as sufficient in the hearers of the Baptist, cannot now be absurd or blame-worthy in his sight.

I doubt not, My Lord, but these haughty professors of reason would pity any one who should yield himself to Christ, and exclaim, "Thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel!" on the evidence which convinced the guileless simplicity of Nathanael. His process of examination was very short. Our blessed

Lord told him, "I saw thee under the fig-tree," and immediately his faith embraced his Saviour in the exclamation above cited. His conviction was suitable to the character given him by Christ, "an Israelite indeed, in whom was no guile." And though a shrewd *examiner*, who loves to search things to the bottom before he yields his assent, would, doubtless, have withheld it from the demand of this dubious miracle, for Christ might have seen Nathanael under the fig-tree without one; yet Nathanael's faith was received with complacency and benignity by the Son of God, who promised him that it should be nourished and rewarded with higher degrees of evidence.

I have never heard, My Lord, that Queen Elizabeth was censured for too hastily adopting the Articles^p, and ordering and enacting Sub-

^p It has been repeated *ad nauseam*, that James I. was the first that required Subscription; and hence the three Articles of the 36th Canon have been called "James's darling Articles." Now it is quite clear, that from the time that Whitgift was seated in the chair of Canterbury, 1583, Subscription had been required, first, to the Queen's supremacy; secondly, to the Liturgy, ordination and consecration services, being agreeable to the word of God; and, thirdly, to the Thirty-nine Articles, being agreeable to the same holy word;

scription to be made to them. And yet it can hardly be conceived, that she gave them that sober and accurate examination which our objectors seem to require from every subscriber. She had recourse to the learned in the Scriptures for setting forth those genuine doctrines of them, which were then generally allowed, and those also that stood in opposition to the gross errors of Papists, Puritans, Anabaptists, Quakers, &c. and she reasonably supposed that those learned and sober divines better saw the force of Scripture allegations, both for establishing fundamental doctrines, and condemning heresy and schism, (for infidelity had then no existence,) than she herself could do by the help of the nicest scrutiny.

A thousand familiar instances must convince your Lordship of the futility of those patriotic examinations and discussions in politics, whose pretended aim is the investigation and discovery of truth, but whose real scope is to confound and stifle it. A volubility of words, accompanied by

which are, in short, the propositions of the three articles of the 36th Canon. Subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles was first required of the Clergy 1570, by an Act of Parliament, entitled, *An Act for the Ministers of the Church to be of sound Religion.* 13 Eliz. cap. 12.

an air of earnestness and zeal for the public good, can make the grossest falsehoods look plausible while the sound rings in our ears ; but, to all except genuine patriots, the charm generally dies with the sound.

After all ; though examination in all cases, and especially in religion and politics, justly demands the privilege of preceding assent, yet we all know, that in politics men disposed to cavil and demur are never likely to come to a determination ; and, “ *Ego amplius deliberandum censeo,*” will be the incessant cry of those who are desirous to confound all measures relating to public utility.

Just the same is the case of our examiners and deliberators in religion ; upon whose principle, no man living could rationally, even in the course of Nestor’s years, embrace the Christian faith, nor any Subscription to the Articles of it ever be made. Consider the hundred thousand questions and scruples which have been agitated concerning every iota and tittle of the sacred volumes ; and your Lordship will soon see, that such an examination as these rational objectors to the Subscription in question require, an examination that may clear all doubts and unravel all difficulties, would equally bar all determinations, all

Subscriptions, as well those of grave Bishops as of Oxford Undergraduates.

Let then the Church of England, and her faithful ally the University of Oxford, stand unshaken upon their ancient basis; and let us not suffer them to be removed, under disingenuous pretences of placing them to better advantage. The main fundamental, scriptural doctrines of our Church, as marked in those Articles, are, to any eye that will see it, most plainly deduced from incontestable proofs of the Scriptures: and as for those particular Articles which rely on facts and circumstances of Church-history, and ancient testimony, such as the canon of Scripture, the errors of Councils, &c. let it be held no abatement of the sufficiency of our examination, if we rely, for the truth of them, on the testimony of the compilers of the Articles; which is hardly so confident a reliance as that which every member of our Church, who is unacquainted with the Hebrew and Greek languages, places on the skill and integrity of the translators of our Bible.

We hear it urged, that “something must be done, some relaxation of our Statute be contrived, for abating the clamours of our enemies, and enabling our friends to support us.”

But though this be gravely said, it is difficult to hear it without smiling. Whence arise these clamours? From our requiring our élèves to declare by a Subscription their acknowledgment of the doctrines of that Church of which they are all baptized members, and in which many of them are to be professed instructors: a declaration which a three hours' conference with their tutor will qualify them to make, without any reasonable imputation of absurdity and prematurity.

What then is that support which we need from our friends? And wherein could our enemies harm us for continuing to enforce our Statute, which has, for almost two hundred years, operated without reprehension, and for which no succedaneum has yet been, nor probably ever can be, offered, which will not expose the University to the irruption of prevaricating infidels and schismatics? Alas! they would, I confess, be likely to do us much harm, if it should ever be in their power; as the most pernicious enemies of religion and her friends, are they who clamour loudly for reason, and yet will not hear it.

It is acknowledged, then, that we stand in need of some powerful protection, and we therefore fly to him for it who is, under God, the most able to protect us—by other means than that pre-

posterior one, of throwing down the fortifications to secure the fortress.

To you, My Lord, your orthodox University looks up, as to him whose eloquence, and wisdom, and authority are best qualified to preserve her dignity and her utility inviolate, to “deliver her from unreasonable^{*} and wicked men, for all men have not faith ;” and by maintaining her laudable *Subscription*, to fix her as a lasting bulwark of that genuine, apostolical Church, which Popery, Calvinism, and Infidelity have hitherto in vain united their efforts to overturn.

In Te spes omnis, Hegio nobis sita est ;
Te solum habemus : Tu es Patronus, Tu Parens ;
Si deseris Tu, Periimus.

* 2 Thess. iii. 2. The word *ἀνέμω*, here translated *unreasonable*, signifies incommodious, troublesome, unseasonable, impertinent. Some would include in the import of it the words, unplaced, unbeneficed. *Original note.*

THE END.

